

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH REHABILITATION SERVICES**



Testimony of  
**Vincent Schiraldi**  
**Director**  
**Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services**  
Committee on Human Services  
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Good Morning, Chairman Fenty and distinguished members of the Committee on Human Services, I am Vincent Schiraldi, Director of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you this morning at the annual performance and spending oversight hearing. Last year at this time my appearance before the committee was quite unique, as the performance oversight hearing was held simultaneously with the confirmation hearing for my appointment as director. At that time I had only been on the job for one month and I was limited in my ability to provide detailed testimony about the Youth Services Administration's (YSA) performance and spending. As you may recall, during that hearing I tried to explain my vision for building the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) and identified several lofty goals that I thought would be necessary milestones along the road to reform.

Today, I will discuss the Department's success with efforts to achieve the goals that were outlined in my oversight and confirmation hearing. During the past year the Department has realized several successes, suffered some unfortunate and at times tragic setbacks, and been faced with greater challenges and obstacles than I originally anticipated. After a year on the job I am every bit as committed to implementing the model of reform I described a year ago, but I am also aware that my passion for rapid change and aggressive reform has to be tempered with realistic timelines more consistent with the Department's resources and infrastructure. I am not in any way preparing to lower the bar of expectations, but I have come to realize many of our plans to implement new programming require a great deal more reform and rehabilitation of systemic capabilities than initially contemplated.

While there is clearly a substantial amount of work still to be done within DYRS, I must emphasize that much of our long-term success will rely on partnerships and relationships outside of the Department. Sustained achievement will be the result of a system-wide culture-change created in collaboration with the courts, probation, DCPS, our sister agencies in the human services cluster, MPD, community based organizations, the District Council, and most importantly the families and neighbors of the young people we serve and the young people themselves. This morning, I will highlight efforts within the Department to implement reform, and continue the conversation about how our ultimate success will depend on both agency improvements and a host of external factors within our influence but beyond our control.

During my oversight and confirmation hearing I highlighted two critical areas of focus: the first was the creation of a wide-range of community-based programs, sometimes called a “continuum of care”; and second, creating model programming for youth confined in DYRS facilities. I would like to spend the remainder of my time discussing our accomplishments in these two areas and speak with you about the promising direction in which the Department is moving.

In my previous appearances before the committee I spoke of the juvenile justice system having an “edifice complex” that is, over-relying on buildings as a response to troubled youth. When I joined DYRS last year there were plans to construct a 250 bed facility on the Oak Hill campus. If constructed, this large facility would have cemented our reliance on large, locked institutions for decades to come. Though I am sure this new facility would have eliminated many of the structural hazards posed by the current out-dated Oak Hill Youth Center, it would have done little to overcome the trappings routinely experienced by large prison-like facilities. This facility not only would have become an impediment to rehabilitation, but by virtue of its sheer size would have encouraged an over-reliance on the use of secure incarceration for our young people and effectively prevented the city from making substantial investments towards developing effective community-based programs, supports and services.

For far too many years, the face of juvenile justice in the District has been Oak Hill. Efforts to reform the system have focused almost exclusively on issues related to Oak Hill in lieu of community programming, whether it be secure or non-secure. In prior years, the District's community-based efforts were largely related to transition services for youth exiting Oak Hill and returning to the community. While transition is important, a more appropriate approach would be to (1) divert those youth from confinement who can be better served by community based programming, and (2) drastically improve our secure care facilities, both physically and programmatically.

My charge as Director has been to do just that - develop programming that minimizes the number of youth that enter locked institutional settings and maximizes the number that receive services in normalized home-like settings. In other words, to change the Department from one that focuses simply on reducing bad behavior by youth into one that focuses on "catching youth doing something good" by building on their strengths and assets. In that way, we won't let the floor of crime-free and drug-free behavior become the ceiling for the young people in our care, any more than we would let that be the pinnacle of expectations for our own children.

Each month I issue a message to all DYRS staff entitled "From the Director". In this month's newsletter I wrote to staff about how we spent our first year "walking the line." That is to say, we are essentially walking the line between a deficit-based approach and a positive youth development approach – between an approach that says we're successful if our kids simply "do no wrong" and one that says we aspire for more. Positive Youth Development (PYD), which I will describe in more detail in a few minutes, is an approach that focuses on youth's and family's strengths and assets, as opposed to the traditional approach of identifying problems and seeking to "cure" these problems through a medical approach.

We also spent the first year walking the line between the old and the new, between being YSA and DYRS, a sub-cabinet agency and a cabinet agency, a beleaguered agency that was looked down upon and sued for unconstitutional conditions and one that is establishing its place in the District government as a promising, forward-looking entity hoping to emerge from that law suit and provide quality and effective programming to the youth and families with whom we work.

As I testify before you today, it strikes me that, despite a tremendous amount of dissatisfaction with the two current deficit-based approaches to juvenile justice (the law enforcement/correctional approach and the medical/mental illness model) no juvenile justice system in the United States has fully embraced a Positive Youth Development approach.

Ours will be the first.

I had hoped that during the Department's first year we would have developed more elements of our continuum of care and would have done so sooner. We were able to develop and contract for a number of model programs that previously did not exist in the District, but we did so only recently and haven't had the length of experience with those models I would have hoped we'd have by now. Clearly, I was overly optimistic as to the pace my Department would be able to move. In many ways the timeline has been closer to that suggested by Council-member Gray during his questioning of me during my oversight hearing a year ago, when he identified the challenges of getting programs up and running at the pace to which we aspired.

In spite of the challenges, in the past year we have successfully implemented several of the programs I first described during last year's oversight hearing. Today, we are poised to expand services and continue introducing new programming. Over the past year we were able to implement the following programs as the first steps in creating our continuum:

- **Evening Reporting Centers** (ERCs)– This is a program that the Committee has heard me mention several times in testimony, and was modeled after centers in Chicago. ERC’s are an intensive form of community placement, providing six hours of daily, face-to-face supervision by adults for youth awaiting trial. Over the past year one of the issues the District attempted to address was youth awaiting trial failing to appear for their court dates. ERCs are the type of programming that provides youth with valuable community-based programming and greatly increases their likelihood for appearing for court dates. Our first center opened in the late spring in Ward 4 and provided services to youth from Wards 1, 2, and 4. An ERC serving Ward 8 is expected to be operational this month, and a Ward 7 center should be on-line the latter part of the year. Although the program has yet to be used to capacity, we are very pleased with the initial results of our first center, where 95% of the youth who have gone through have not been re-arrested and 98.5% have not missed their court appearances. We are hopeful that these results can be duplicated in Wards 7 and 8, where half of all youth involved with the system reside.
  
- **Intensive 3rd Party Monitoring** – In August 2005 we were awarded a \$1 million grant from the Federal Government for Intensive 3rd Party Monitoring. Intensive 3rd Party Monitoring is community-based program where youth have multiple face-to-face daily contacts with a case worker. Face-to-face contacts are substantially increased from the two (2) times a week that was typical under YSA to three (3) times a day for a total of 21 times a week. These services are provided by a host of proven national and local vendors including the Alliance of Concerned Men, the Peaceaholics, the Youth Advocacy Program (YAP), and Culbreth and Culbreth. Because these programs started in late Fall, there is no outcome data yet. Our hope is that, as the population at Oak Hill falls, we will be able to fund this model out of funds reprogrammed from Oak Hill custody funds.
  
- **Multi-Systemic Therapy** – Another program we initiated that we are very excited about is Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST). MST is an evidence-based program that targets chronic, violent, or substance-abusing juvenile offenders. MST provides 60 hours of professional interventions over four (4) months with the families of chronic juvenile offenders. The staff members are available 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week. According to the *Blueprints for Violence Prevention*, a nationally respected evaluation program funded by the Justice Department and based at the University of Colorado, chronic juvenile offenders who graduated from MST are one-third as likely to be re-arrested within four years of receiving individual therapy. We initially contracted for 16 slots in partnership with the Department of Mental Health. This was recently increased to 48 slots. Our long-term plans include doubling the slots available next year for a total of 96. The initial outcome data for MST is somewhat disappointing, with one third of the youth referred to the program since July having been rearrested. Before we expand the program we will be watching the monthly data outcomes to make sure those numbers improve.

- **Supervised Independent Living** - We also issued human care agreements for Supervised Independent Living and Extended and Therapeutic Family Homes. Supervised Independent Living is geared to youth 16 and older who are unable to remain safely at home and are in need of supportive community linkages that will assist them in making a successful transition to a healthy, productive adulthood. As part of the youth's Individual Wraparound Plan, program staff place youth in a supervised apartment or scattered-site apartment living arrangement and assist youth in accessing education, employment, life-skills training, health and mental health services, and other opportunities to promote the youth's well-being.
  
- **Extended Family Homes** - Extended and Therapeutic Family Homes are similar to foster homes, in that the provider contracts with a family to place youth (ideally two (2) youth will be placed with each family, with a maximum of four (4) who are unable to safely reside with their families. Extended family homes receive respite care, additional in-home staff support, and training. The homes also are linked with the natural family whenever possible. If the youth is able to return to their family, the Extended Family Home provides respite care to the family. We have issued human care agreements for Extended Family Homes and Therapeutic Homes. We expect to have youth being serviced by Extended Family Homes and Independent Living before the end of winter.
  
- **REFAM: Return to Families** – Finally, one of the first programs we initiated within DYRS was the Return to Families Unit, also known as “REFAM.” REFAM identifies and coordinates targeted community-based supervision and services for detained and committed youth as an alternative to secure confinement. REFAM I provides services primarily to pre-disposition youth in shelter houses. REFAM II works primarily with youth in secure detention. Since implementing the program REFAM I has received 135 referrals, 65 of which were released consistent with REFAM planning and assistance. REFAM II has received 52 referrals and successfully placed 51 youth.

### **Institutional Improvements**

When I was appointed as Director, I inherited two primary issues, both of which were the impetus for elevating DYRS to a cabinet level department: first, the closure of Oak Hill; and second exiting the Jerry M Consent Decree. I spent my first few months talking with the plaintiffs, parents, advocates, and the District Council about how I planned to address these longstanding issues. When I testified last year, we had 251 youth in locked custody, 17 at the then brand new Youth Service Centers (YSC), and 234 at Oak Hill. I testified that I planned to reduce the number of locked youth to 166 by September 30 and that I expected to hire 31 fewer YCOs than was called for in the staffing plan which existed at that time. While the population at Oak Hill has been reduced from where it was last February, we did not achieve the reduction in population I originally expected, and instead of hiring fewer YCO's, we were required to hire 126 more to meet court-ordered staffing ratios.

### **Oak Hill Youth Center**

During the initial months of my tenure, the population at Oak Hill was well in excess of the court ordered limit. YSA's ongoing issues with exceeding the population limit had already led to millions of dollars in fines for the administration, which came out of last year's and this year's budget for DYRS. Combined with the opening of the YSC and aggressive population reduction efforts during the first part of 2005, we were able to successfully reduce the population, put an end to accruing fines, and close three housing units that were most unsuitable for our youth and staff. Unfortunately, combined with an increase in court ordered commitments and an increase in the number of youth detained pre-trial by the court, we had to re-open the units that were closed. Though we are not currently exceeding the court ordered limit, the increase in population is hampering our ability to permanently close units in poor condition and implement reform efforts that we believe will enhance the safety, operation, and quality of services at Oak Hill.

The highlight of the year for many of the family members, plaintiffs, and many members was the Mayor's fulfillment of his commitment to build a new facility to replace the current out-dated and dilapidated Oak Hill Youth Center. We announced in September plans to replace the existing facility with a state of the art 60-bed facility, 20 of which we hope to move eventually to within the District's borders. Though we are only in the pre-design phase of the construction project, this is a major accomplishment for DYRS. Just two weeks ago the Committee held a hearing on the grounds of Oak Hill to discuss this project. I look forward to continued collaboration with the Committee to identify solutions that will allow us to expedite and streamline construction so that young people and staff are no longer in the current Oak Hill facility.

In addition to our construction plans we are implementing changes that will better prepare our staff to operate a new facility and enhance their ability to play a more meaningful role in the lives of Oak Hill residents. At practically every hearing in which I have provided testimony related to Oak Hill, you have heard me mention the "Missouri Model". During the hearing two weeks ago we heard testimony from Pili Robinson, one member of the Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) team that is currently working to help us change the correctional culture that permeates Oak Hill and to train Oak Hill staff in best practices. MYSI is comprised of former staffers of the Missouri Youth Services Division who created, what is widely regarded as, *the* premier juvenile institutional reform effort in the nation's history. Though bringing the "Missouri Team" on board is considered one of our year's great accomplishments, it was also one of our great challenges. The process to procure their services was far more time consuming and burdensome than expected. I understand procurement is an issue for many agencies in the District, and that in many cases the Council believes agencies over-rely on the services of consultants. But in this case, I believe the relationship with MYSI is going to prove to be an invaluable catalyst to eradicate the "corrections" culture, enhance staff skills, and improving quality of services at Oak Hill.



## Youth Services Center

During the past year we participated in two initiatives to improve services for detained youth in our care. First, Earl Dunlap, founder and Executive Director of the **National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA)**, began working with staff at the YSC in July to improve safety, security, and operations. One of the problems posed by opening of YSC was that none of our staff had any experience working in a facility of this type. Mr. Dunlap is working closely with the superintendent to develop policies and enhance training for staff assigned to YSC.

Second, the District of Columbia was selected as a Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) in record time, largely due to the commitment evidenced by the District's executive, legislative, and judicial branches. JDAI was pioneered by the Annie E. Casey Foundation of Baltimore and has shown extraordinary success in sites around the country, including Chicago, IL. Working collaboratively with key decision makers in each of those sites, JDAI has been able to reduce the unnecessary use of detention, lower costs, increase the use of rigorous community based alternatives, and most importantly, reduce crime, re-arrests, and failures to appear. This summer, we joined with our partners at the DC Superior Court, Court Social Services (CSS), the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), the Public Defender Service (PDS), the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) in establishing the District as a JDAI site. Unfortunately, thus far, since becoming a JDAI site, our detention population has increased by approximately 40%. Despite that fact, the JDAI workgroup, now co-chaired by Family Court Presiding Judge Anita Josey-Herring and Deputy Mayor Brenda Donald Walker, has made a strong commitment to reducing lengths of stay for youth in detention, improving alternatives to incarceration, and improving screening of youth facing detention to make sure that the right youth are detained, they don't languish in detention, and that there are an array of quality programs to divert them into in lieu of confinement.

### **Positive Youth Development (PYD)**

Last year when I was before you I presented a road map to immediately address long-standing issues like overcrowding, safety, constructing of a facility to replace the Oak Hill Youth Center, and exiting the Jerry M. consent decree. I understand that your jobs today are to oversee how well the Department has managed its resources, provided services, and achieved the goals outlined for the past year. I would like to ask you to begin to look at juvenile rehabilitation in the District in new light. I would like to ask you to step away from the deficit based approach that has long ruled the day and embrace the Positive Youth Development model that we are working towards.

The essence of positive youth development can be found in the motto DYRS has adopted: – *Treat the young people like they're your own, but never forget they're someone else's.* I don't greet my daughter each day she comes back from high school by saying "Oh, I'm so proud of you, you didn't take drugs, get pregnant, or get arrested in school today!" and yet those are standards of achievement we set for our DYRS youth all the time. For us, our motto, vision and mission need to drive us towards two essential goals, which are consistent with the tenets of Positive Youth Development.

One is, don't settle for a deficit-based approach, one that treats the floor of crimelessness and drug-free existence as if it is the ceiling, just like you wouldn't accept those lowered horizons for your own loved ones.

But the second part of the motto - "*...never forget they're someone else's*" - requires that we empower the youth and their families to be a part of developing their own plans of which they will, ultimately, be the primary executors.

We recognize that, for our own sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, grandchildren, cousins and God-children, the path to a problem-reduced life is through the achievement of certain competencies and skill sets. Our job as parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and God-parents is to help young people achieve those skills and competencies so they can flourish. An important byproduct of achieving adult competencies is the absence of anti-social behavior, but that is the floor, not the ceiling.

So how does positive youth development really differ from a deficit based model? A Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach views the youth as an active participant in the change process, instead of as a client or target of change. The key strategy for a traditional Juvenile Justice (JJ) approach is control; for PYD, it is connecting the youth with community resources. So, for example, a traditional JJ approach would send a youth to job counseling and order community service as a punishment; PYD would look to engage the youth in career exploration and career-path work experience and use community service as service learning and job preparation. Most importantly, in the traditional JJ work, the aim is to *diminish a youth's problems or deficits*; in PYD, it is to *build on a youth's strengths and assets*.

So let's look at some examples. Over the past six (6) months, three different entities associated with DYRS have been grappling with the issue of changing our treatment planning approach from a traditional medical/mental health model "treatment team" approach to one that is more empowering and asset-based called alternately – Family Team Meetings (FTMs) or Family Group Conferencing. The Treatment Team Improvement Team, the Center for Community Empowerment, and the Interagency Collaboration Task Force have all concluded that case plans can and should be developed cooperatively with youth, their families, all agencies affecting the youth's life, and community members, including vendors and non-vendors – in other words, through Family Team Meetings.

For many of us (myself included) this challenges our education, training, and many years of experience. As a social worker, I know I was trained to sequentially interview key respondents, go back to my office and develop a case plan. All too often, that training was in identifying a client's needs and deficits and creating a plan that was designed to "cure" them. FTMs involve sharing the power over plan development with the youth, their family, and other government and non-government agencies and community members. The theory (borne out in other places where FTMs are routine, including DC's CFSA) is that having "owned" the planning process, the youth and family will now "own" the plan, rather than resist it as something externally imposed.

The second example is inviting a parent group, Parent Watch, and a youth-led advocacy organization, Justice 4 DC Youth, into our midst as partners to help us reform our system and empower consumers of our services (i.e. parents and youth) to become active participants in setting policies that affect their lives. In the Fiscal Year 2006 budget the Council appropriated funding to Parent Watch, we have added to that funding, and also supported foundations to provide funding to Justice 4 DC Youth. Through our partnership and support of Justice 4 DC Youth we are on the verge of making history at Oak Hill where Justice for DC Youth will soon be opening a chapter on the Oak Hill campus making it the first such chapter of a youth advocacy organization inside a locked facility in the country.

Some have suggested that, as we're going through our changes, we're making our neighborhoods less safe. Significantly and thankfully, the evidence does not bear that out. In fact, it appears as though the disturbing trend of increasing juvenile arrests and killings from the two years predating my arrival is showing signs of abating. Last year, after two years of increasing juvenile crime and homicides, juvenile crime overall, and killings by and of youth, fell in 2005. To underscore the significance of this fact, this occurred in a year during which overall arrests for adults rose slightly, a phenomenon you'd never know about from reading the local papers.

Just locking kids up doesn't result in better outcomes for kids or more public safety.

It never has...

It never will...